

Today, Congressman Pete Stark joined with the entire California delegation to announce their introduction of H.R. 2270, a bill to amend the Clean Air Act to allow California to phase out the use of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) as a gasoline additive because it is contaminating drinking water across the State. "It is possible for California to achieve federally mandated clean air standards without raising gas prices and without contaminating our drinking water," Rep. Stark stated.

MTBE has polluted California's underground drinking water for years. Experts estimate that MTBE has contaminated over 10,000 groundwater sites in California. Because of the danger of MTBE, Governor Gray Davis has ordered a phase-out of its use in the state by 2003. However, with federal regulations mandating a two percent oxygenate in gasoline to achieve clean-burning fuel, such a phase out would run afoul of federal law without a waiver. At this time, the only alternative to MTBE is ethanol. However, State officials fear that there is not a sufficient supply of ethanol to meet demand in California, which would lead to higher gas prices for motorists. The California Energy Commission has estimated that phasing out MTBE without a waiver from the federal government could cost California consumers nearly \$1 billion per year.

California's own reformulated fuel program already exceeds the standards set by the federal reformulated fuels program, meaning California can maintain clean air without using MTBE and without having to rely exclusively on the short supply of ethanol. H.R. 2270 would amend the Clean Air Act to allow for this to occur. "California is already facing an electricity energy crisis. We do not need to add insult to injury and force California's gas prices to soar even higher when a reasonable legislative solution exists to prevent that. Northern Californians already pay nearly the highest prices for gas in the country," Stark stated.

Every member of the California delegation wrote to EPA Administrator Whitman requesting support for California's MTBE waiver request. The Bush Administration denied the request.

Rep. Stark concluded: "EPA's decision leads me to believe that the Bush Administration does not have the best interest of the environment or Californians in mind. Our only solution is to create a legislative waiver for California's MTBE requirement. This united, bipartisan support from our delegation is a clear signal of the importance of this issue to California. I look forward to working with my colleagues to create a win-win here – continuing to protect California's environment and controlling unnecessary price increases for consumers."